The book is well printed and the reproduction of the plates excellent, the price is exceedingly moderate, and we can recommend the work as an excellent one for the beginner.

Tunbridge Wells and Neighbourhood. Edited by H. R. Knipe. Pp. 207. (Tunbridge Wells: Pelton, 1916.)

THIS volume is a welcome addition to the series of local surveys which owe their origin to the annual congress of the South-Eastern Union of Scientific Societies. The series was begun by the "Survey and Record of Woolwich and West Kent," which was published in commemoration of the twelfth congress of the Union, held at Woolwich in 1907; and later surveys have been issued in connection with the congresses held at St. Albans, Hampstead, and Bournemouth. The present volume makes a notable addition to the series, despite the fact that, owing to the war, it has been brought out under special difficulties.

The South-Eastern Union of Scientific Societies is heartily to be congratulated on these surveys. They are all of them confessedly provisional; but if they are made the basis of patient and continued work, and if they open out beyond the biological and archæological fields to the civic and sociological fields as well, they will mark a great step forward in the much-needed development of regional survey. Two lines of development readily suggest themselves: that each year all the affiliated societies in the area in which the annual congress of the Union is to meet should map out in good time the contributions already available for a local survey and the ground which still requires to be surveyed; and that, after the annual congress has met, further work should be organised and the results printed at intervals uniformly with the congress volume, and so be readily incorporated.

There is always an abundant demand for guide-books of the popular and familiar kinds, but we see no reason why many towns and districts should not gradually provide themselves and their visitors with regional surveys, progressively developing in scope, exhaustiveness, and accuracy, and forming guide-books of a higher and a more intelligent order. Mr. Knipe and his collaborators are to be heartily congratulated on having provided the first draft of such a guide-book for Tunbridge Wells and neighbourhood. C. H. G.

Through South Westland. A Journey to the Haast and Mount Aspiring, New Zealand. By A. Maud Moreland. Second Edition. Pp. xviii +222. (London and Melbourne, Christchurch, Wellington and Dunedin: Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd., n.d.) Price 6*s.* net.

THIS entertaining description of a five weeks' riding tour in South Island, New Zealand, gives an excellent impression of the character of the country traversed and much information as to the kindly disposition of the inhabitants. Both the text and the beautiful photographs with which the volume is provided will interest students of the geography and natural history of New Zealand.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

[*The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts intended for this or any other part of* NATURE. *No notice is taken of anonymous communications.*]

Life Assurance Tables.

YOUR article in NATURE for July 6, pp. 383–4, quotes me correctly "that life assurance business has been based upon mortality tables which represented the expectation of life under the relatively unhealthy conditions which existed a half-century ago"; and then, a few sentences later, the article makes the above quotation credit me with saying that the mortality tables were *published* "a half-century ago"—which I did not say.

Your article explains that the mortality table published in 1901, now in use by the assurance companies (of Great Britain?), is based upon mortalities observed by sixty assurance companies under the relatively unhealthy conditions which existed during the thirty years 1863 to 1893—that is, from more than "a half-century ago" (fifty-three years) to twenty-three years ago, *an average of thirty-eight years ago.* It is within the last thirty-eight years that the great advances in preventive and curative medicine (excepting vaccination) have been made.

The American Experience Table was compiled by Homans in the year 1868, and was based chiefly upon the mortality data of the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York. These data therefore represent the relatively unhealthy conditions which existed in a period of time averaging considerably more than "a half-century ago." As the writers of the article on life insurance in the last edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" (p. 666, second column) say, the American Experience Table "is now in wider use than any other for computing the premiums of American companies." It therefore seems that my sentence, quoted in the first paragraph, thoroughly respected the value of under-statement. W. W. CAMPBELL.

Lick Observatory, August 7.

Pre-Columbian Use of the Money-Cowrie in America.

IN NATURE of August 10 (p. 488) there was a notice of an article by Mr. C. B. Moore (published in the Journal of the Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia, 2nd Ser., part ii., vol. xvi.) on the explorations of aboriginal sites in the Tennessee River valley, which raises the interesting question of the provenance of certain cowries found there. These are pronounced by Dr. H. A. Pilsbry, the well-known American conchologist, to be examples of the money-cowrie, *Cypraea moneta,* of Eastern Seas, and they have never been recorded before from an aboriginal mound in the United States. Nor has the species ever been recorded living on any of the shores of the Americas. To account for their presence in the Tennessee mound, Dr. W. H. Dall, another of America's leading conchologists, has suggested that the cowries "may have come off one of Columbus's own ships"!

In the Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass., is the dress of a Cree woman, collected by the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804–5, on which are four dozen cowries of the dwarf variety *atava* of *C. moneta* (see *American Anthropologist,* 1905, for picture).

Willoughby believes these cowries were sold to the Indians by the Hudson Bay Company in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

Montgomery (Transactions of the Canadian Institute

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1910, ix. (1), No. 20, p. 7, pl. 4, f. 6) records and figures a cowrie found in the Serpent Mound, Ontario. It is a regular *C. moneta,* and it is suggested that "this is probably one from the Hudson Bay Company's stock."

But these suggestions entirely ignore the uses made of the cowrie in America. If Columbus and the Hudson Bay Company really introduced *C. moneta,* as these speculations demand, are we to assume that they also instructed the Indians in certain remarkable ceremonials practised with this shell in Africa, India, and China? Is there any reason for believing that Columbus was even aware of such uses, and if he were, that he should have had the foresight to take *C. moneta* with him, and have devoted the limited time he spent in America in teaching the natives some of the lesser-known elements of Indian and Chinese beliefs?

The money-cowrie is, and has been for centuries, a sacred object among the Ojibwa and Menomini Indians, and is made use of in initiation ceremonies of the Grand Medicine Society (see Hoffman, Bureau of Ethnology, 7th Annual Report, 1885–86 (1891), and 14th Annual Report, 1892–93 (1896); also NATURE, January 27, 1916, for abstract of paper by the writer).

The tradition among the Indians is that the original sacred shell came through a particular hero-god, who acted as intermediary between the Great Unknown and the Indians, and founded their Medicine Society.

The initiation ceremonies consist of much dancing and the shooting forward by the medicine men of their medicine bags containing the sacred cowries. Mystic powers are attributed to the shells, and it is firmly believed that if they be swallowed by the medicine man, all he is obliged to do to transfer his power to the medicine bag is to breathe on it, the mysterious power and influence being then transmitted by merely thrusting the bag towards the desired object or person. At initiation ceremonies the magic influence is shot at the candidate's breast, and the cowrie—the symbol of life—is supposed to enter his heart; he becomes unconscious and falls forward on his face. The chief medicine man then raises the candidate's head slightly from the ground, and a sacred cowrie drops from the candidate's mouth.

The same shells are used apparently at baptismal ceremonies of the Ojibwa (see Greenwood, "Curiosities of Savage Life"). There is the same dancing and shooting forward of the medicine bags, and after much facial contortion each medicine man spits out two shells.

The essential part of these ceremonies is the supposed death and survival of the candidate, and it is remarkable how closely the prevailing idea of the cowries being connected in some strange manner with resurrection and resuscitation agrees with the ancient Chinese belief as evidenced in the ceremonial use of money-cowries in obsequies of the dead. In pre-Christian and later times cowries were used in China, in association with rice, for stuffing the mouth of the dead. Wild rice, it might be added, also enters into the ritual of Ojibwa and Menomini ceremonies.

Manchester Museum. J. WILFRID JACKSON.

Notice of Possible Suspension of the Rules of Nomenclature in the Cases of Holothuria, 1758, vs. Physalia, 1801, and Bohadschia, 1833, vs. Holothuria, 1791.

IN accordance with the requirements prescribed by the International Congress of Zoology, notice to the zoological profession is hereby given that on or about October 1, 1917, the undersigned proposes to recommend to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature that the rules be suspended in the following cases:—

Holothuria, Linn., 1758 (type *physalis*), vs. *Physalia,* Lamarck, 1801 (type *pelagica*). The effect of suspension will be to retain *Physalia* as generic name for the Portuguese man-of-war.

Bohadschia, Jaeger, 1833, vs. *Holothuria,* Bruguière, 1791. The effect of suspension will be to retain *Holothuria* for the sea cucumbers.

The motion for suspension includes the following points:—

(1) Suspend the rules in the case of the generic names in question.

(2) Permanently reject *Holothuria,* 1758, type *physalis.*

(3) Validate *Physalia,* 1801, type *pelagica* (syn. *physalis,* 1758).

(4) Accept *Holothuria* as dating from Bruguière, 1791, despite the existence of *Holothuria,* 1758 (if rejected).

(5) Said suspension is not to be construed as invalidating any specific name.

The grounds for suspension will be:—(*a*) A strict application of the rules in these cases will result in greater confusion than uniformity, because (*b*) the cases involve a transfer of generic names, almost universally accepted in the sense given above since 1791 (for *Holothuria*) and since 1801 (for *Physalia*), to genera in other groups in connection with which they have been used by only a very few authors during more than 100 years.

The undersigned cordially invites zoologists to communicate, not later than September 1, 1917, to him or to any other member of the Commission, either their approval or disapproval of the proposed action.

C. W. STILES,
Secretary to Commission.

Office of Secretary to International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH.

THE first report of the Advisory Council of the Committee of the Privy Council for Scientific and Industrial Research was published in full abstract in the issue of NATURE for September 7, and has probably already been read by all who are interested in this important matter. It will therefore be unnecessary to refer in detail to the contents of the report, but it is essential to consider it in its broad aspects and thoughtfully to estimate its bearing as a contribution to the subject of much discussion and contention in the past two years.

One feature of the report is the degree to which it repeats much that has been said and written by British scientific men, engineers, and practical manufacturers in the public discussions which have taken place on this subject during the past twenty-five months or more, but without carrying the matter forward by the prescription of practicable remedies for recognised defects. The arguments for and against various actions are weighed with an air of detachment which gives to it rather the character of an interesting essay than the authoritative decisions of a committee possessing executive power. The public has, without doubt, looked

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